

SANITARY COMMISSION.

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**No. 68.**  
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PRELIMINARY REPORT

OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE SANITARY COMMISSION WITH THE
ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, DURING THE CAMPAIGN OF
JUNE AND JULY, 1863.

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WASHINGTON, July 23d, 1863.

TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
of the Sanitary Commission :

Gentlemen,—In accordance with your request, a statement of recent operations in the Department of the Potomac is herewith presented. No general reports having been received from the Inspectors in the field, and the secretary of the department being still absent at Gettysburg, it will necessarily be incomplete, but will suffice to show that the organization of the Commission has accomplished its design in the premises, notwithstanding misfortunes for which it was not to be expected that provision should be made.

\*The Army of the Potomac broke camp on the Rappahannock on the 12th of June, the effective forces moving northward by forced marches, and the sick and wounded being removed by rail to Aquia Creek, and thence by steamboats to Washington. A small part of the Commission's Potomac Relief Corps was sent with the marching columns; the stores and furniture of the relief stations and dépôts at Falmouth, Potomac Creek, and

Brook's Station were hastily but safely removed to Aquia Creek, whence, as soon as the inmates of the hospitals had been embarked, they were all shipped on a steamboat which had been held there for that purpose.

The number of hospital patients to be removed was nearly ten thousand. They were taken from Aquia Creek on such boats as the Quartermaster's Department was able to obtain for the emergency at Washington. No provision having been made on board of them for such service, and being crowded, there was necessarily much hardship. The patients were landed immediately on the arrival of the boats at the government wharf at Washington, where, owing to the necessarily limited number of vehicles which could be commanded, they accumulated in large numbers. The agents of the Commission, with a considerable volunteer force engaged for the occasion, labored night and day to provide for their wants, and this with as much good judgment as zeal. A kitchen having been previously established on the wharf, cauldrons of hot beef soup and coffee, with bread by the wagon-load, were kept constantly ready, and served to all as soon as they arrived, and as often as needed while they remained. More than eight thousand were fed in a single day, and most of the patients thus received the only nourishment they obtained from the time they left the camps on the Rappahannock till they reached their destination in the fixed hospitals. Those going northward from Washington were a second time provided for in a similar manner, at the railway station in Washington. Many of the agents of the Commission labored at this time two and three days and nights without rest. The ordinary "special relief" business of the Commission at Washington was at the same time much increased. Twenty stragglers and discharged men died at its Home within the fortnight.

The wagons of the Commission attending the army on its

march were frequently replenished with supplies sent out from the dépôt at Washington, and daily rendered valuable assistance to the surgeons having the care of the men wounded in the skirmishes, in the cavalry engagements at the gaps of the mountains, and those falling ill under the fatigues and privations of the several forced marches, undertaken in the heat of midsummer in a dry and desolated region.

Immediately upon the retreat of General Milroy's forces from Winchester, it was ascertained that the supply of hospital stores at Harper's Ferry was very limited, and a relief agent was sent in charge of a wagon-load of such stores, from the Commission's dépôt at Frederick, as would supply the more important deficiencies. This was got safely through, but the wagon, on its return, with the teamster and horses, was captured by Stuart's cavalry. The relief agent, having remained with the wounded at Harper's Ferry, escaped. The teamster is still missing.

The Commission's stores at Frederick were safely concealed during its occupation by the enemy, but as soon as the Army of the Potomac reached there, the dépôt was again opened and the stock increased. The wagons moving with the army have since received their supplies from this point.

When the enemy was known to have crossed the Potomac in force, responsible and experienced officers of the Commission were stationed at Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Frederick, and a systematic daily communication was established between the agents moving with the different columns of the army and the central office of the Commission. Supplies were accumulated and held ready for movement at different points on the circumference of the seat of war, and care was taken to have ample reserves at the branch offices ready for shipment. With the first news of the battle of Gettysburg, Westminster, the nearest point of railroad communication to the battle-field, was fixed upon as the point of ap-



proach, and authority to run a car daily with the government trains to that station was obtained.

Two wagon-loads of battle-field supplies had been distributed to meet deficiencies in the stores of the surgeons, shortly before the battle commenced. These wagons returned to Frederick for loads, and two others, fully loaded, arrived from Frederick at the moment of the assault of Longstreet upon the left wing of the loyal army, and were driven under fire to reach the collections of wounded in its rear. As one of them came to a point where several hundred sufferers had been taken from the ambulances and laid upon the ground behind a barn and in an orchard, less than a thousand yards in the rear of our line of battle, on the left wing, then fiercely engaged, a surgeon was seen to throw up his arms, exclaiming, "Here is the Sanitary Commission, now we shall be able to do something." He had exhausted nearly all of his supplies; and the brandy, beef soup, sponges, chloroform, lint and bandages, which were at once furnished him, were undoubtedly the means of saving many lives. The empty wagons which had gone back to Frederick, were reloaded and ready to leave there on the 4th. Dr. McDonald, who was acting Chief Inspector in the field, having arranged for the further movement of supplies by Westminster, undertook to conduct one of the wagons to Gettysburg by Emmitsburg, the nearest route; the other was sent by the way of Westminster. The latter got safely through to the hospitals in the rear of the army; the former, with Dr. McDonald and the Rev. Mr. Scandlin, a relief agent, and the teamster, fell into the hands of the enemy's cavalry, and have since been heard of, marching as prisoners with the rebels in their retreat. Dr. McDonald having been charged with the chief responsibility of the operations of the Commission upon the battle-field, and especially with that of arranging communications and methods of supply, his absence, the cause of which was not for some days

understood, caused some embarrassment. Supplies having however, arrived at Westminster, *before the close of the battle*, a school-house centrally situated among the corps hospitals, was taken as a field dépôt, to which they were as rapidly as possible brought by the three remaining wagons then on the ground, and from which they were rapidly distributed where most needed. Eleven wagon-loads of special supplies were here distributed to the corps-hospitals and to scattering groups of wounded found in the field, before any supplies arrived by railroad. Additional means of transportation were at length procured from the country people, of whom also some stores were obtained, and a station was opened in the town of Gettysburg. On the 6th, the branch railroad to Gettysburg, which had been broken up by the enemy, was so far repaired as to allow a train to approach within a mile of the town. By the first train which came over it after the battle, two car-loads of most valuable goods were sent by the Commission, and two or more went by each succeeding train for a week. The wounded now began to be brought from the field to the railroad for removal to fixed hospitals elsewhere. As they arrived much faster than they could be taken away, they were laid on the ground exposed to the rain, or to the direct rays of the July sun, without food. This having been anticipated and provided for by the Commission's agents, in Baltimore, on the second day the Commission had a complete relief station, on a large scale, in operation, at the temporary terminus of the railroad. It consisted of several tents and awnings, with a kitchen and other conveniences. From that time to the present, from one to two thousand wounded men have been fed at this station daily, and from one to two hundred furnished with beds at night. With the completion of the road, the relief station was removed to the town; a new and larger depot for the distribution of goods was also established in the town, and additional horses and wagons to assist in this duty were got up from Baltimore.

In the meantime, the movements of the army and the prospects of another great battle on the Potomac, demanded the attention of the Commission. Six new wagons, with horses, were procured in Baltimore and Washington, and sent to Frederick, to which point also supplies were forwarded by rail, and thence transferred by wagons to Boonsboro, where a house was taken and a dépôt established on the same day that it was occupied by General Meade. A house for a dépôt was also secured at Hagerstown as soon as the enemy retired from it. Supplies were at the same time sent by rail down the Cumberland Valley, with wagons and horses for their further carriage, procured in Philadelphia.

The above is a very imperfect outline of the general plan of measures taken to secure a prompt application of the means of relief entrusted to the Commission, at the points where it was likely to have the greatest value.

The following is an incomplete statement of the quantities of the principal articles distributed by the Commission to the wounded upon the field at Gettysburg, during the ten days following the battle. The perishable articles (amounting to over 60 tons) were taken to the ground in refrigerating cars. A considerable quantity of the same articles purchased from or contributed by the farmers about Gettysburg, is not included under this statement :

Of drawers, shirts, and other hospital body-clothing, 39,884 pieces, being equal to full suits of clean bed-clothing for ten thousand wounded men.

Of beds, sheets, blankets, comforts, pillows, cushions for wounded limbs, and musquito nets, 11,700 pieces, being equivalent to a complete bed equipment for eighteen hundred men severely wounded.

|                           |        |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Of Bed utensils.....      | 728    |
| “ Towels and napkins..... | 10,000 |



|                                   |       |          |
|-----------------------------------|-------|----------|
| Of Sponges .....                  | 2,300 |          |
| “ Combs .....                     | 1,500 |          |
| “ Buckets .....                   | 200   |          |
| “ Soap, Castile .....             | 250   | pounds.  |
| “ Oil silk .....                  | 300   | yards.   |
| “ Tin basins, cups, etc. ....     | 7,000 |          |
| “ Old linen, bandages, etc. ....  | 110   | barrels. |
| “ Water tanks .....               | 7     |          |
| “ Water coolers .....             | 46    |          |
| “ Bay rum and Cologne water ..... | 100   | bottles. |
| “ Fans .....                      | 3,500 |          |
| “ Chloride of lime .....          | 11    | barrels. |
| “ Shoes and slippers .....        | 4,000 | pairs.   |
| “ Crutches .....                  | 200   | pairs.   |
| “ Lanthorns .....                 | 180   |          |
| “ Candles .....                   | 350   | pounds.  |
| “ Canvas .....                    | 300   | sq. yds. |

*Of Articles of Sustenance, viz. :*

|                                                                                   |        |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| Fresh poultry and mutton .....                                                    | 11,000 | pounds.  |
| “ Butter .....                                                                    | 6,100  | “        |
| “ Eggs, (chiefly collected for the occasion at farm-houses in Pennsylvania, ..... | 8,500  | dozens.  |
| “ Vegetables .....                                                                | 675    | bushels. |
| “ Berries .....                                                                   | 48     | “        |
| “ Bread .....                                                                     | 10,300 | loaves.  |
| Ice .....                                                                         | 20,000 | pounds.  |
| Concentrated beef soup .....                                                      | 3,800  | “        |
| “ milk .....                                                                      | 12,500 | “        |
| Prepared farinaceous food .....                                                   | 7,000  | “        |
| Dried fruit .....                                                                 | 3,500  | “        |
| Jellies and conserves .....                                                       | 2,000  | jars.    |
| Tamarinds .....                                                                   | 750    | gallons. |
| Lemons .....                                                                      | 116    | boxes.   |
| Oranges .....                                                                     | 46     | “        |
| Coffee .....                                                                      | 850    | pounds.  |
| Tea .....                                                                         | 426    | “        |
| White sugar .....                                                                 | 6,800  | “        |

|                                  |              |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Syrups, (lemon, etc.).....       | 785 bottles. |
| Brandy.....                      | 1,250 “      |
| Whiskey .....                    | 1,168 “      |
| Wine.....                        | 1,148 “      |
| Ale.....                         | 600 gallons. |
| Biscuit, crackers, and rusk..... | 134 barrels. |
| Preserved meats.....             | 500 pounds.  |
| Preserved fish.....              | 3,600 “      |
| Pickles.....                     | 400 gallons. |
| Tobacco .....                    | 100 pounds.  |
| Tobacco pipes.....               | 1,000        |

The service of the Commission has never been more honorable to those engaged in it than in this campaign. The fact that four agents of the Commission are now prisoners of war taken while endeavoring to push forward supplies; that in performing assigned duties several of them have on many occasions risked their lives, while others, forgetful of self, have labored continuously during successive days and nights; and that while there have been many critical points in the arrangements of the service, nothing of consequence has failed to be found at the time and place demanded,—testify to the courage, zeal and industry, no less than to the patience and good discipline which has been displayed. More than double the usual number of persons have been employed; nearly all these added to the force have been formerly in the service of the Commission, however, and volunteered their aid for the emergency. This accounts for the large amount of work which has been done on certain occasions with a comparatively small display of force. The general superintendence has been a very light and grateful duty.

Respectfully,

FRED. LAW OLMSTED,

*General Secretary.*